

Northeast Sands

Socio-economic and Cultural Context

This summary of the socio-economic and cultural context of the Northeast Sands is substantially taken from the Northeast Sands chapter of the [Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin book](#) (WDNR 2015).

The socioeconomic and cultural contexts of a region must be considered in any planning process. While this plan focuses on resource and recreation management of the properties, these underlying contexts are important in understanding the needs of the public when planning the properties of the Northeast Sands Ecological Landscape (NES EL). The demographic and economic data reported here are for the four counties that make up the majority of the NES: Florence, Marinette, Menominee, and Oconto counties.

Socio-economic Characteristics

Land Use and Ownership

A significant proportion (approximately 38%) of the land in the NES EL is in public ownership (federal, state, or county). The landscape also includes the eastern portion of the Menominee Reservation, which occupies most of Menominee County and contains forests of high conservation significance. Three-quarters of the land is forested, with about 62% of that being in private ownership. Agriculture makes up only 7% of the land area and is mostly concentrated in the southeastern and northernmost portions of the EL.

Population, Housing, and Income

The four counties making up the majority of the NES EL (Florence, Menominee, Oconto, and Marinette) are traditionally rural, with a low population density – 27 persons/square mile in 2010, compared to 105 for the state as a whole. Population density is higher in Marinette and Oconto counties and lower in Menominee and Florence counties. Population trends are mixed for the four NES counties, with Florence and Marinette counties projected to lose population over the next several decades while Menominee and Oconto counties are expected to increase in population. As with the state as a whole, the populations of the NES counties are aging, with the proportion of residents over age 65 is expected to increase in all counties over the next several decades.

Housing density across the NES counties is substantially lower than that for the state as a whole. As with population density, housing density is highest in Oconto and Marinette counties and lowest in Florence and Menominee counties. Seasonal and recreational homes are prevalent, accounting for over a quarter of housing stock, well above the state average. Florence County has the highest proportion of housing in seasonal homes, followed by Menominee, Marinette, and Oconto counties.

Per capita and median household income in the NES counties are generally lower than the state average, and the NES counties, especially Menominee County, have also experienced unemployment rates higher than the state average.

Economic Sectors

Economic sectors accounting for the highest percentages of jobs in the NES counties are Government, Manufacturing (non-wood), Tourism, Health Care and Social Services, and Retail Trade. However, several other



sectors, including Mining, Forest Products and Processing, and Agriculture, Fishing, and Hunting, contribute more jobs in the NES counties than the state average for those sectors. In some cases, these sectors contribute more income in the NES counties than jobs in other sectors, demonstrating the economic importance of the region's natural resource base.

Cultural Context

There is a long history of human resource use and settlement in the NES EL, though the archaeology of northern Wisconsin is fragmentary and poorly understood. There is little evidence of habitation in the NES until the time of the Woodland tradition (approximately 2,500 to 350 years ago, although starting somewhat later in northern Wisconsin than in the south). By the 1630s, the Menominee were established in much of northeastern Wisconsin, centered on the NES EL, along the Menominee River. They likely had contact with French fur traders, who arrived in Wisconsin in the 1650s. The fur trade was firmly established in Wisconsin by the end of the 1600s and lasted into the early 1800s, when overexploitation of furbearers caused the fur trade to move north into Canada. The U.S. Government acquired land from various Wisconsin tribes through removal treaties after the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and relocated tribal members to lands west of the Mississippi River, although the Menominee signed a treaty in 1854 establishing a reservation of over 250,000 acres, mostly in present-day Menominee County. Permanent Euro-American settlement in the region began in 1851 with the founding of Oconto County.

The NES counties played a significant role in the early logging era of the state. Rivers were important in transporting cut timber to sawmills, and the towns of Peshtigo, Oconto, and Marinette were three of the main mill centers in the NES counties. Mining and agriculture have not historically played major roles in the NES.

Currently, the NES is primarily rural. Oconto County is the most urban-influenced of the NES counties, due to its proximity to the Green Bay metropolitan area. Marinette County is considered to have moderate urban influence, while Menominee and Florence counties are more remote and rural, with little urban influence. Florence and Marinette counties also are considered nonmetro recreation counties, due to a combination of economic factors indicating dependence on tourism and recreation dollars, as well as retirement destination counties, due to recent significant increases in the proportion of residents age 60 and over. Menominee County is distinguished from the others in suffering from much higher rates of poverty and unemployment.

